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ABSTRACT

Two studies examined people's ideas about conflicts between the morality of friendship and the morality of individual autonomy. Study 1 included 144 subjects of 15, 18, and 21 years of age. In individual interviews, subjects were asked (1) what they would do in dilemmas in which friendship expectations conflicted with individual autonomy; (2) the reason for their decision; and (3) whether meeting a friend's expectations would be breaking friendship rules. Subjects also completed a questionnaire on the quality of friendship with their best friend, and another on their acceptance of individualistic values. Findings indicated that older students emphasized the morality of individual autonomy less than younger students but were no more likely to make individualistic decisions. Younger students resolved friendship-individualism conflicts by asserting their individual rights; older students resolved these conflicts by setting boundaries on friendship obligations. Students' decisions about dilemmas were unrelated to their endorsement of individualistic values but were related to the quality of their friendships; friendships with more negative features were associated with less compliance to friendship expectations. Study 2 used the same methodology as Study 1, but included adult graduate students--79 from the United States and 69 from India. More Indian than American adults resolved conflicts by complying with friendship expectations. However, Indian adults endorsed individualism more often than American adults. The differences between American and Indian adults' decisions about the dilemmas were not related to differences in friendship quality. In both studies, decisions showed little consistency across dilemmas. Two tables list the dilemmas used in the studies. (KDFB)

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The Morality of Friendship versus the Morality of Individual Autonomy

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Abstract

Expectations that friends should provide one another with companionship, help, and emotional support define a morality of friendship. Beliefs that people have the right, within broad limits, to arrange their lives as they choose define a morality of individual autonomy. Because obligations to help friends lessen individuals' freedom, the two moralities often conflict. To explore people's ideas about such conflicts, two studies were done. Study 1 included students who were 15, 18, or 21 years old (N=144). These students made decisions about dilemmas in which expectations of friendship conflicted with some facet of individual autonomy. On several dilemmas, older students emphasized the morality of individual autonomy less than younger students. The students' decisions about the dilemmas were unrelated to their endorsement of individualistic values but were related to the quality of their friendships. Study 2 included 79 adults from the United States and 69 adults from India. Like the students in Study 1, these adults made decisions about dilemmas in which friendship and individual autonomy were in conflict. More Indian adults than U.S. adults resolved the conflicts by complying with expectations of friendship. On measures of attitudes and values, however, Indian adults endorsed individualism as much or more than U.S. adults did. Other findings suggested that the differences between U.S. and Indian adults' decisions about the dilemmas were not due to differences in the quality of their friendships.

Introduction

Children, adolescents, and adults expect best friends to be companions for each other, to help each other, and to provide emotional support to each other. These expectations of friendship can be viewed not simply as describing friends' typical behavior but as defining the obligations that friends have to each other. In short, expectations for friends' interactions may define a morality of friendship.

Children, adolescents, and adults also have ideas about their individual rights. These rights include the ability to make one's own decisions unless those decisions would hurt other people, violate others' rights, or threaten the social order (Nucci, 1981). In the United States especially, adults are assumed to place a high value on independence and self-reliance (e.g., Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985). Indeed, U.S. adults seem to attach moral force to the obligation to act as an individual. This morality of individual autonomy is expressed in sayings such as, "you need to do this for yourself," and "you have to do your own thing."

The morality of friendship can conflict with the morality of individual autonomy. For example, strong believers in individualism might assert their right to choose their own activities rather than to do activities suggested by friends. Similarly, extreme individualists might not want to rely on a friend's help because doing so would compromise their independence and show a lack of self-reliance.

Two studies were conducted to explore how adolescents and adults reason

about conflicts between friendship and individualism. Some researchers have argued that individualism increases during adolescence (e.g., Waterman, 1992). If so, young adults should make individualistic decisions in such conflicts more than adolescents do. This hypothesis was tested in Study 1. Moreover, many researchers have argued that people from the United States are more individualistic than people in many other cultures. In particular, U.S. adults emphasize their responsibilities to other people less than do adults from Asian countries such as India (Miller, Bersoff, & Harwood, 1990). U.S. adults might therefore emphasize individual autonomy more than friendship expectations when the two conflict. This hypothesis was tested in Study 2. Finally, female adolescents and adults typically have more intimate friendships than males do (Berndt, 1996). Females might therefore comply with expectations of friendships more than males do. This hypothesis was tested in both studies.

Study 1

Method

The participants were 144 students who were 15, 18, or 21 years of age. The sample was divided evenly by age and sex. During an individual interview, each student heard about six dilemmas in which expectations of friendship conflicted with some aspect of individualism. For example, in one dilemma students had to decide whether to accept their best friend's invitation to go to a movie that they knew they would dislike. This dilemma presents a conflict between the expectation that friends will be companions for one another and personal preferences in movies. Table 1 lists all six dilemmas. When [Name] is printed in the table, the name of a student's best friend was inserted when presenting the dilemmas.

After hearing each dilemma, students indicated what they would do and how certain they were of their decision by choosing one point on a 7-point scale. They were then asked to give the reasons for their decision. Next, they were asked if not meeting the friend's expectations would be "breaking a rule or expectation of friendship." They responded on a 7-point scale with higher scores for more definite "yes" answers, and then gave their reasons for that response.

Then students completed a questionnaire on the quality of their friendship with their best friend. The questionnaire included items about positive friendship features such as intimacy and prosocial behavior, and about negative features such as conflicts and rivalry (see Berndt & Keefe, 1995). The students also completed a

questionnaire with items on their acceptance of individualist values (adapted from Braithwaite & Law, 1985; Triandis, 1989). Some items asked students to rate the importance of values such as "independence (being self-reliant, self-sufficient)." Other items asked students to rate their agreement with statements such as, "In the long run the only person you can count on is yourself."

Students' decisions on each dilemma were analyzed separately, because choices of the individualistic and friendship alternatives were not consistent across dilemmas. Students' reports on the features of their friendships and on their values were highly consistent across items (alpha coefficients $\geq .77$), so final measures were created by summing across relevant items.

Students' reasons for their decisions and for their judgments about breaking rules or expectations of friendship were coded into mutually exclusive and exhaustive categories. Coders were trained to a level of greater than 80% agreement before they began coding the actual data.

Results and Discussion

A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) of students' decisions on the dilemmas did not yield a significant main effect of age ($p > .05$). Thus, contrary to the original hypothesis, individualistic decisions were not more common among older students. However, the age effect was significant ($p < .001$) in a MANOVA of students' judgments about whether individualistic decisions would break a rule or expectation of friendship. As Figure 1 shows, on three dilemmas 15-year-olds were

less likely than older students to say that an individualistic decision would violate a rule or expectation of friendship. These data suggest that acceptance of the morality of individual autonomy may decrease between adolescence and adulthood.

When students who said an individualistic decision would not break a rule or expectation of friendship were asked why not, younger students more often gave purely individualistic reasons (e.g., "I don't have to do what I don't want to"). Older students who made similar judgments more often justified them by saying that a dilemma did not involve friendship expectations (e.g., "Friends don't have to do everything together"). In other words, younger students more often resolved conflicts between friendship and individualism by asserting their individual rights. Older students more often resolved such conflicts by setting boundaries on friendship obligations.

The MANOVA also yielded a main effect of sex and an Age $\times$ Sex interaction. Univariate tests showed a main effect of sex only on the dilemma about the movie. Female students said they would go with their best friend to a movie that they disliked more often than male students did. Age $\times$ Sex interactions were significant on two of the six dilemmas. On both dilemmas the sex differences in decisions were significant at only one age (15 or 18 years). In both cases, male students at that age made more individualistic decisions than female students did. These data are partly consistent with the hypothesis that females are more willing to comply with a friend's expectations than males do. However, no significant sex differences were

found in judgments about whether an individualistic decision would violate a rule or expectation of friendship.

On all six dilemmas, students whose friendships had more positive features more often said they would comply with expectations of friendships. On four dilemmas, students whose friendships had more negative features less often said they would comply with expectations of friendship. By contrast, students' decisions about the dilemmas were largely unrelated to their endorsement of individualistic values. That is, students' decisions seemed to depend more on their ideas about friendship than about individual autonomy.

Study 2

Method

The participants were graduate students at Purdue University. One group included 69 students from India, all of whom had best friends who were also from India. A second group included 79 students from the United States, all of whom had best friends who were also from the United States. Most of the students (73%) were male, because the population of Indiana graduate students at the university was predominantly male. Similar numbers of Indian and U.S. students were recruited from each of several academic departments, in an attempt to ensure that the two groups were comparable except for their nationality.

The students completed a questionnaire that began with six hypothetical dilemmas. Each dilemma required students to decide between an individualistic action and an action consistent with expectations of friendship. For example, in one dilemma, students had to decide whether to try to master a difficult class on their own or to ask their closest friend for help. Table 2 lists the six dilemmas.

On each dilemma, students indicated what they would do and how certain they were of their decision by choosing one point on a 6-point scale. Then students indicated the most important reason for the decision by choosing from alternatives listed on the questionnaire. These reasons were derived from ones given by Indian and U.S. students during preliminary interviews.

Next, students judged whether an individualistic decision on each dilemma

would be breaking a rule or expectation of friendship. For example, they were asked to assume that they asked for help with the class, but that their friend refused to help. Then they decided whether the friend's refusal would break a rule or expectation of friendship, and why or why not.

Finally, the students answered questions about the positive features and the negative features of their relationship with their closest friend. They also rated their endorsement of individualistic values and their agreement with statements expressing individualistic attitudes (Triandis, 1989).

As in Study I, students' decisions on each dilemma were analyzed separately, because choices of the individualistic and friendship alternatives were not consistent across dilemmas. Students' reports on the features of their friendships and on their values were highly consistent across items, so final measures were created by summing across relevant items.

Results and Discussion

The hypothesis that U.S. and Indian adults would make different decisions on the dilemmas was largely supported. A MANOVA with students' decisions as the dependent variables revealed a main effect of nationality ($p < .001$). As Figure 2 shows, univariate tests revealed four dilemmas on which Indian students said they would comply with expectations of friendships more than U.S. students did. Interestingly, Indian and U.S. students made similar decisions only on the dilemmas involving academic tutoring and studying.

Students' judgments about whether an action would be breaking a rule or expectation of friendship also varied with nationality ($p < .001$). The univariate tests were significant on the dilemmas that involved buying a briefcase, asking for money for textbooks, and visiting a friend who is upset. On each dilemma Indian students emphasized individual rights and privacy less, or expected friends to help each other more, than U.S. students did.

Neither the main effect of sex nor the interaction of Sex $\times$ Nationality was significant. Thus, the sex differences found on some dilemmas in Study 1 were not replicated in this study with older adults. Sex differences were found in students' reports about their friendships. Women described their friendships as having more positive features than men did, but reports of positive features did not vary significantly with nationality. Unexpectedly, Indian students said their friendships had more negative features than U.S. students did.

Mean scores on the measures of students' values did not vary significantly with nationality or sex. However, on the measure of individualistic attitudes, men had higher scores than women. Surprisingly, Indian students expressed more individualistic attitudes than U.S. students did. That is, Indian students agreed more than U.S. students with statements such as, "If the group is slowing me down, it is better to leave it and work alone." These findings suggest that beliefs about the rejection of individualism in Indian culture may need reevaluation.

Finally, students who rated their friendships higher in positive features more often made decisions consistent with expectations of friendship. On most dilemmas, however, students with better friendships were less willing to say that their own or their friend's action would break a rule or expectation of friendship. That is, these students were less willing to judge any action as breaking a rule of friendship, whether that action was "friendly" or individualistic. As in Study 1, students' decisions on the dilemmas were largely unrelated to the endorsement of individualistic values and attitudes.

Conclusions

1. In both studies, students' decisions showed little consistency across dilemmas. Students who chose to comply with expectations of friendship on some dilemmas also chose to assert their individual rights and freedom on other dilemmas. Consequently, more research is needed to see whether the moralities of friendship and of individual autonomy refer to unified sets of ideas or to several distinct sets of beliefs.

2. In Study 1, 15-year-olds endorsed the morality of individual autonomy more than older students did. Purely individualistic reasons also were more common among 15-year-olds than among older students. These findings suggest that 15-year-olds are still fairly egocentric and not as accepting of their social responsibilities as young adults are. The findings also imply that previous hypotheses about an increase in individualism between adolescence and adulthood need to be stated more carefully.

3. In Study 2, Indian adults were more willing than U.S. adults to comply with expectations of friendship that conflicted with individual autonomy. However, the Indian adults endorsed individualistic attitudes and values as strongly as U.S. adults did. These mixed results imply that the balance between the morality of friendship and that of individual autonomy varies across cultures. However, the cultural differences may not be adequately described by global assertions about the individualism of Western culture.

4. On some dilemmas in Study 1, female students at one or more ages were more willing to comply with friendship expectations than male students were. In Study 2, sex differences in decisions about conflicts between friendship expectations and individual autonomy were absent. Apparently, females do not have consistently greater concern with interpersonal responsibilities and social obligations than males do. More refined hypotheses about the sex differences in moral positions are needed.

5. In both studies, students' decisions about the dilemmas were related to the quality of their friendships but not to their endorsement of individualistic attitudes and values. However, differences in people's ideas about the morality of friendship were not completely explained by differences in friendship quality. Indian adults had friendships no higher in quality than those of U.S. adults, but Indian adults decided to comply with friendship expectations more than U.S. adults did. Apparently, people's ideas about individual rights versus obligations to friends depend on both specific experiences with friends and more general processes of acculturation.

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Table 1

Dilemmas Used in Study 1

1. Movie. It is Friday, and you have no plans for the evening. [Name] calls you just before dinner. S/he says a new movie just opened that day, and s/he asks you to see it with him/her. S/he tells you what it is, and you know immediately that you would hate it. But [name] says s/he really wants you to go with him/her to the movie that night.
2. Assignment. Suppose that it's 7:00 on a Thursday evening. You've completed your homework and are starting to study for a test you will have tomorrow. You planned to study all evening because the test will count for one third of your semester grade. Suddenly [name] calls and asks for your help. S/he has an assignment due tomorrow that you did in one of your classes a week ago. S/he wants you to come over and help him/her with the assignment. The assignment is a big one, so if you go, you might end up spending the entire evening with him/her.
3. Tennis. It's a summer afternoon, and you've been playing tennis with [name] for an hour or so. You're a better tennis player than [name], and today you've been unbeatable. [Name] hasn't won a single game, and s/he's getting really mad. You wonder if you should ease up a bit and let him/her win a game or two before you quit for the day.
4. Workout. It's Saturday afternoon, and you're about to leave for your regular workout at the gym. Then [name] knocks on the door and says s/he's upset about a letter s/he just got. S/he asks if s/he can talk with you about it. You quickly guess that the conversation will last a long time, so you won't get to the gym before it closes if you start talking with him/her.
5. Tutoring. At lunch one Monday, [name] tells you that s/he just received his/her midterm grade in math. It was an F. S/he's worried about passing the course, and s/he knows that you're really good in math. You also have a little bit of spare time this semester. [Name] asks you if you'll tutor him/her for the rest of the semester. S/he'd like you to check his/her homework, because that's an important part of the grade, and also help him/her review before the weekly quizzes.
6. Concert. [Name] has asked you to go to a concert with him/her. You have to tell him/her that you already have tickets to go to the concert with John/Jane, a guy/girl that you and [name] met a few weeks ago. [Name] says s/he feels bad that you agreed to go to the concert with John/Jane without checking with him/her first. S/he asks that next time you check with him/her first before you make plans with someone else.

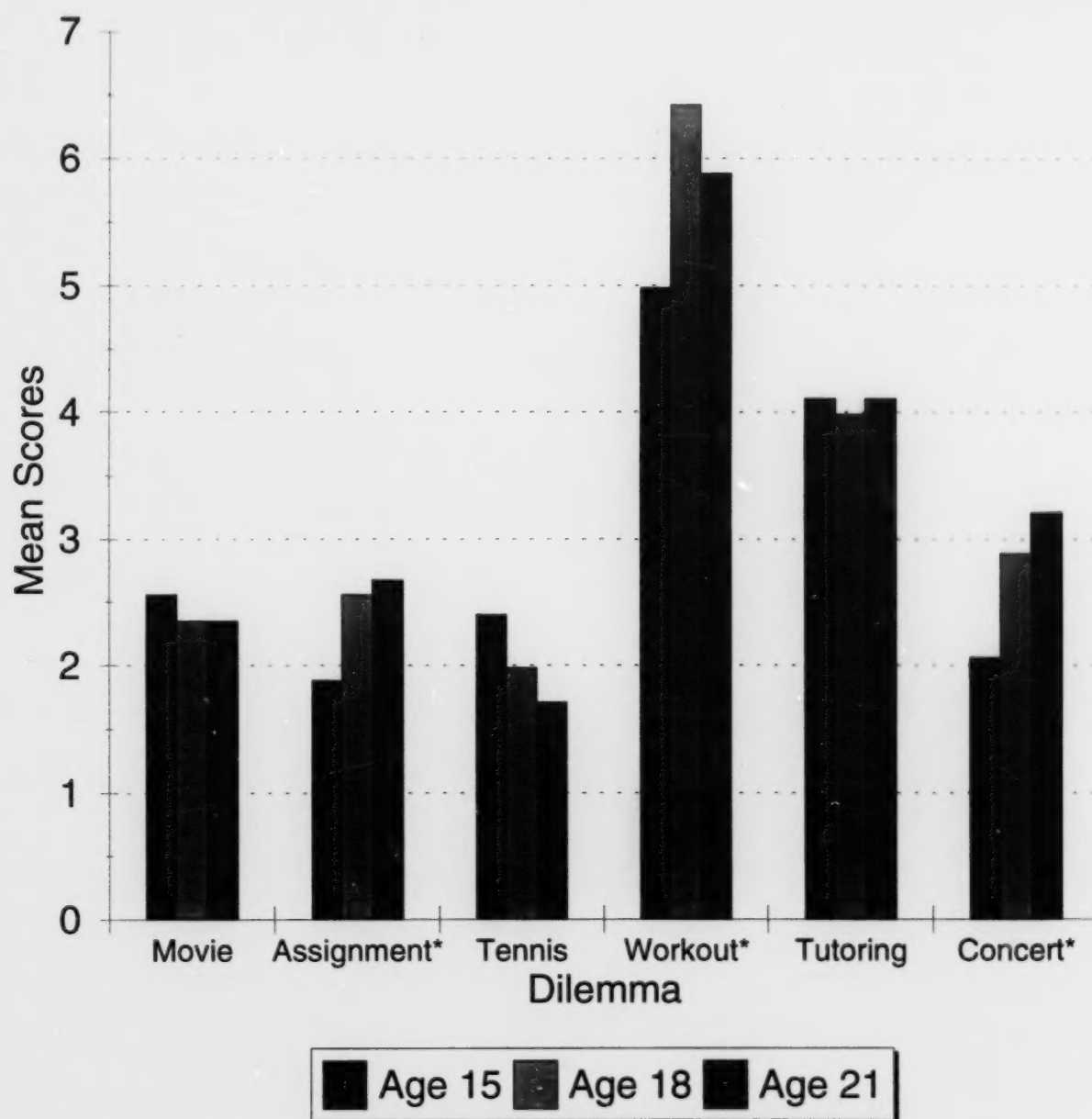
Table 2

Dilemmas Used in Study 2

1. Ask for help with a class. Suppose that you have just received your midterm grade in a class that is crucial to your program. It is a C and you are very disappointed. [Name] is taking the same class and he/she got an A on the midterm. Would you ask [Name] to help you with the class, by discussing the assignments or helping you study for the next exam?
2. Don't let friend buy briefcase. Suppose that you have an expensive leather briefcase that you had planned to use on job interviews. [Name] gets a call for his/her first job interview and asks to borrow the briefcase so he/she can look more professional. You loan it to [Name], but when he/she returns from the interview, the briefcase looks terrible. [Name] explains that someone accidentally spilled acid on it during a visit to a lab. It is obviously damaged beyond repair. Would you let [Name] buy you a new one, if he/she offered to do so?
3. Agree to study together. Suppose that it's Thursday night. You have a big test in one of your classes Friday morning. You've just started studying when [Name] calls. [Name] is in the same class and wants to come over to study with you. You think that you would study better by yourself. What would you say to him/her?
4. Ask for money for textbooks. Suppose that it's the beginning of the semester and you haven't bought your textbooks yet. You've been waiting for a check that's supposed to come in the mail, but the check has been delayed. Unless you get some money elsewhere, you won't be able to buy your textbooks until the end of the second week of classes. If you knew that [Name] had enough money in a checking account to pay for your books as well as his/hers, would you ask him/her to loan you money for the books?
5. Visit friend who is upset. Suppose that [Name] is really upset about something, like flunking an exam. Another person tells you that [Name] went home feeling bad so you call him/her on the phone. [Name] says he/she doesn't want to talk on the phone, so you offer to come over to visit. But [Name] says he/she doesn't want you to come; he/she would rather be alone. Would you go to see [Name] anyway, to try to make him/her feel better?
6. Take a drink without asking. Suppose that you and [Name] were walking around town, doing errands, on a hot summer afternoon. You finally go to his/her place to relax and cool off. [Name] has a refrigerator where he/she keeps cold drinks. Would you open the refrigerator and get yourself something to drink immediately, or would you ask if that's okay first?

Figure 1

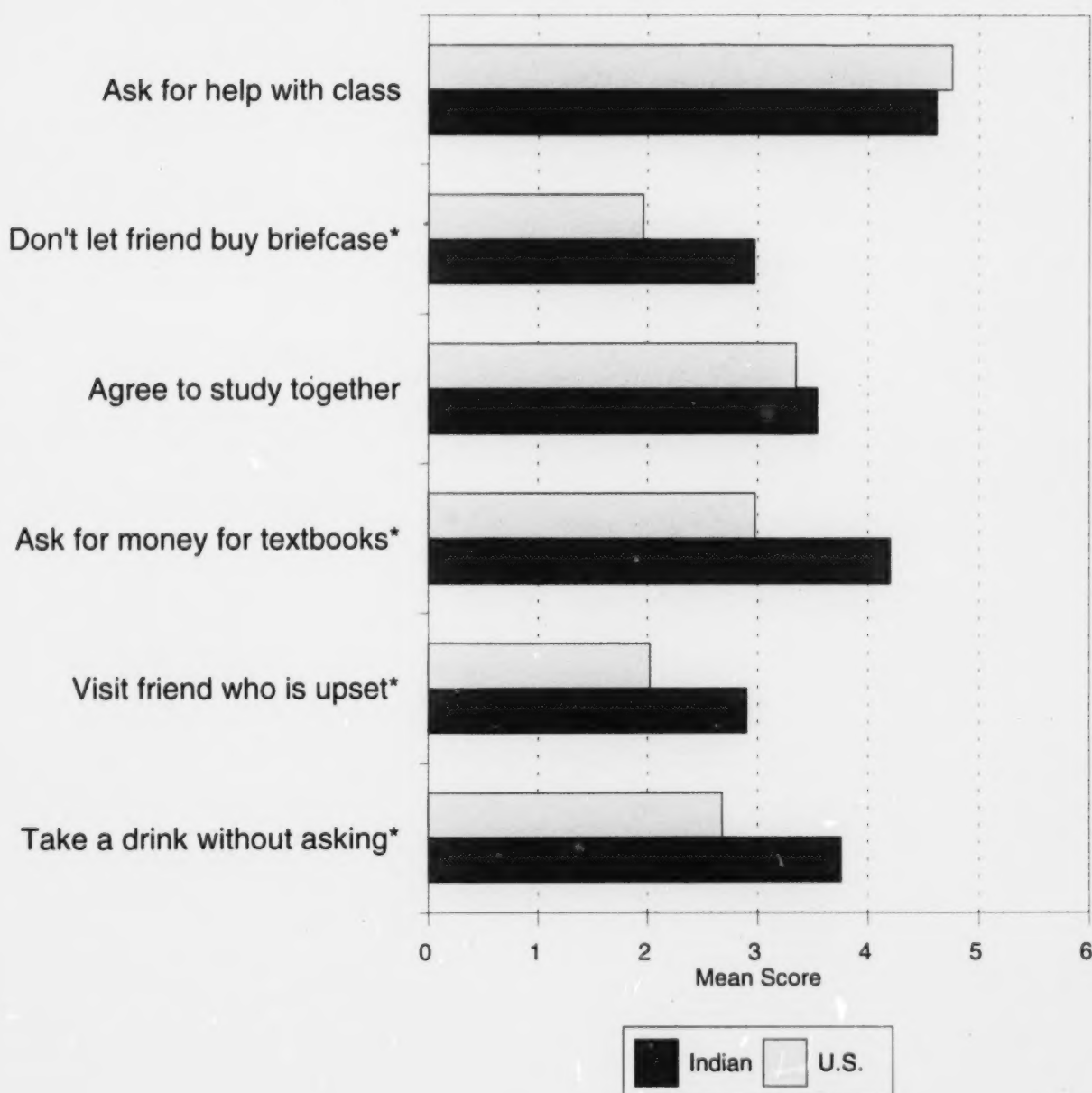
Judgments that Individualistic Decisions Would Break Friendship Rules



*Age differences were significant on this dilemma.

Figure 2

Choice of Friendship vs. Individualism (Higher Scores for Friendship Choice)



*Difference between U.S. and Indian adults was significant on this dilemma.